

World of Poetry-Lovers to Celebrate Centenary of Birth of Browning.

ONE hundred years ago next Tuesday was born that "high master of strong-winged verse," destined to bring to his art a power and method not unakin to those of Wagner in music or of Rodin in sculpture. His looks and traits, charm of manner and versatility; the arguments pro and con as to his obscurities of style; his romantic courtship and perfect wedded life.

Compiled by
WARWICK JAMES PRICE.
**A LIFE OF LOVE
ANSWERING LOVE
AND HONOR FOLLOW-
ING GOOD WORK**

"Externally, Browning's life was far from sensational; he was born, lived and died in a conventional atmosphere."—H. A. Beers.

May 7, 1812—Born at Camberwell, near London, England.

June 11, 1812—Baptized at the York Street "dissenting chapel," being named after his father, a bank clerk, who was also a book-lover and a clever caricaturist.

Largely self-educated, with that father's aid, his other schooling included a year at Peckham, three years under a tutor (1824-29), and four months' lectures (1829-30) at University College, London. He announced in after life, "I am a graduate of the University of Italy," and quoted in "De Gustibus" as his own creed Queen Marie's couplet:

Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it "Italy!"

1833-34—Traveled in Italy and Russia, thinking of a diplomatic career.

1833-34—devoted himself to letters, leaving three volumes of verse and seven dramatic poems.

May 25, 1841—Kenyon (hence thereafter called by the poet "The Joy-giver"), introduced him to Elizabeth Barrett, "in an invalid-darkened room on Wimpole Street." She was three years Robert's senior, a deep, earnest, impulsive nature, who had written an epic on "Marathon" at eleven, an "Essay on Mind" at sixteen, and a translation of Aeschylus at twenty-four. Leigh Hunt had hailed her as "the most imaginative poetess that has appeared in England—perhaps in Europe. She is an ultra-sensitive sister to Lord Tennyson."

After two years of friendship, mainly carried on through correspondence, as the father of the invalid not only disapproved of Browning, but thought Elizabeth should be preparing to die, the two were secretly married at the Church of St. Marylebone (September 12, 1846), and soon after crossed to the Continent. Barrett was never reconciled to the match, although Browning's devoted love soon brought color to the wan cheeks and the trust to into a life starved for it. (W. R. Nicoll.)

The honeymoon lasted fifteen years, spent in Italy for the most part, though there were occasional visits to Paris and three trips back to England; "a perfect life of sympathy, trust and love." (F. V. N. Palfrey.)

March 9, 1849—Robert Barrett Browning born at Casa Guida Palace, Florence.

June 29, 1861—Death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "Beautiful" was the last word she was heard to utter. September, 1861—Browning returned to London, taking up his home at 19 Warwick Crescent, a father living with him till his death, five years later.

From 1850 to 1870 Browning had been wondered at rather than followed; from 1870 till his passing in 1889 he stood forth an intellectual force of great magnitude. His first academic recognition had been an honorary M. A. from Oxford, in the spring of 1857, but in the last two decades of his life both the great universities hung the hoods of D. C. L. and LL. D. on his shoulders, he was made a life governor of the University of London, honorary president of the Associated Societies of Edinburgh, and a foreign correspondent of the Royal Academy. He was offered, too, the rectorships of Glasgow and of St. Andrews, but declined the honors. His only public address was delivered (April 17, 1881) when he was given a decree by Edinburgh University.

August, 1878—Visited Italy for the first time since his wife's death; also returned for brief stays in 1888 and 1889.

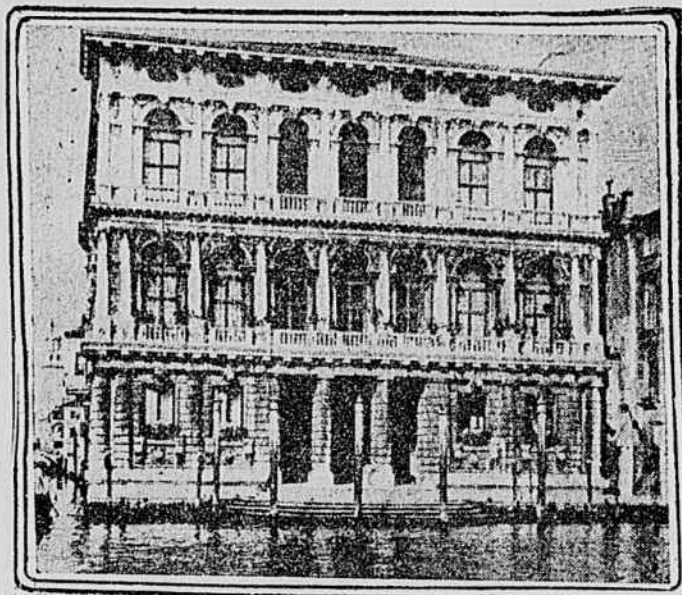
1887—Moved from Warwick Crescent



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.



ROBERT BROWNING.
Born May 7, 1812.



The Palazzo Rezzonico, Venice, home of Robert Barrett Browning, where his famous father died on December 12, 1880.

to 29 De Vere Gardens, Kensington Gore, his only sister, Sariana, keeping house for him.

December 12, 1889—Died in the Venetian home of his son, Palazzo Rezzonico. "When the news was flashed from Venice that Robert Browning had died men felt as if old times felt when a great King had passed away."—Stopford Brooke.

December 31, 1889—Buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Gone from us! That strong singer of late days—

(Sweet singers should be strong—who, tarrying here,

Choose still rough music for his themes austere,

Hard-headed, aye, but tender-hearted days,

Carefully careless, garden half, half maze,

His thoughts he sang, deep thoughts to thinkers dear,

Now flashing under gleam of smile or tear,

Now veiled in language like a breezy haze,

Chance-pierced by sunbeams from the lake it covers,

He sang man's ways—not heights of sage or saint,

Not highways broad, not haunts endeared to lovers;

He sang life's byways, sang its angles quaint,

Its rustic lore inscribed on stone or stone,

Song's short-hand strain—its key oft his alone,

(Aubrey De Vere, in Macmillan's Magazine, February, 1890.)

LOOKED NOT AT ALL THE POET HE WAS; HIS STRENGTH AND TRAITS AND IDEALS

"A square, solidly built man, with hair white hair and beard, dressed in rough gray cloth, and wearing an air of bourgeois dignity and pleasant bonhomie. . . . My imagination helped me to recognize immediately the signs of genius in the broad forehead and penetrating eyes under their heavy brows."—Theodore Tilton (Mme. Blanc).

Few ever spoke of Browning as handsome; "purposeful looking" and "of a fine poise" were the more usual phrases. "He has the repose of a man who has lived much in the open air, with no nervous uneasiness and no unthoughtful self-consciousness."—George S. Hillard.

His swarthy complexion occasioned many comments. Maurice D. Conway wrote: "Rossetti always contended there was something Semitic in Browning's fine countenance, and the fact that his father had been a clerk of the Rothschilds gave plausibility to the supposition," and William Sharp has added to this: "In his exuberant vitality, in his sensuous love of music and the other arts in his combined imaginativeness and shrewdness of common sense, in his superficial expansiveness and actual reticence, he would have been typical enough of the potent and artistic race for whom

he has so often of late been claimed."

He was of a quiet, simple behavior, though cordial and of courtly manners.

"I had no idea there was a perfectly sensible poet in the world, free entirely from vanity, jealousy, or any other littleness and thinking no more of himself than if he were an ordinary man."—Benjamin Jowett.

"In my memory he will always live as the most cordial man I ever knew. Never can I forget how, on your entrance, he would rise from his chair, advance to meet you with both arms outstretched, and cover you with a rich bounty of welcome."—Augustine Birrell.

"My first and last impression of him was that he resembled one of our old-school Southern country gentlemen more than my ideal of England's mystic poet."—Mary Anderson de Navarro.

"He was a truly catholic spirit, ever holding high ideals; eager and of a consistent energy; enthusiastic, vital, versatile."—W. J. Dawson.

What has been well termed the man's "fundamental optimism" sounds clear in what are, perhaps, his five best known lines:

One who never turned his back, but

Marched breast forward,

Never doubted clouds would break,

Never dreamed, though right were

worst, wrong would triumph;

He held we fall to rise, are baffled to

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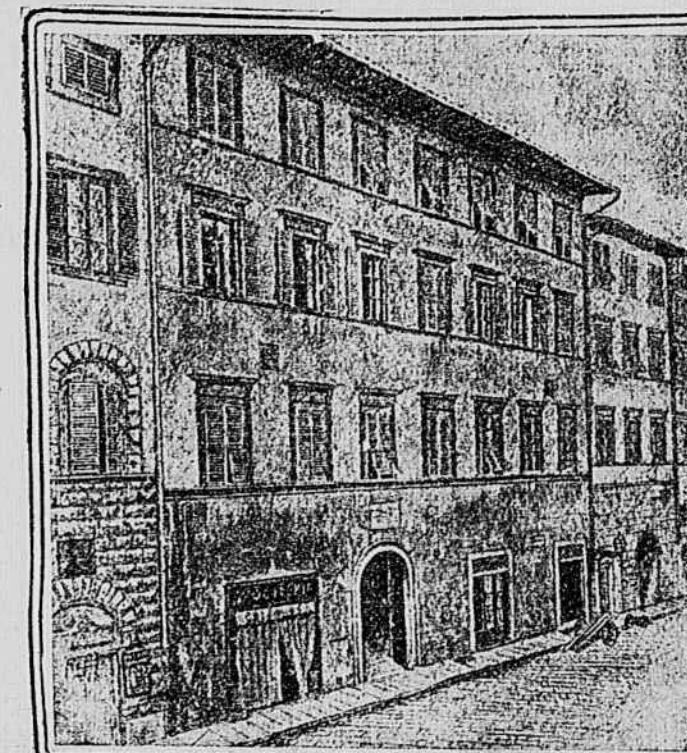
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The ancient Casa Guidi palace, in Florence, where most of "a fifteen years' honeymoon" was spent.

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THIRTY VOLUMES OF NOBLE VERSE MARKED SEVENTY-SEVEN YEARS

1824—(When only 12), "Incondita." A gathering of juvenile, Byronic verse, privately printed by his father. (Soon after Shelley came to be his admiration, and so continued to be for the rest of life.)

1825—"Pauline." Issued anonymously and not a success. (Rossetti thought so well of it that he copied it all in the British Museum.)

1824—"Waring." Anonymous, and dedicated to Alfred Donnet.

1825—(March), "Paracelsus." This won him a name in literary circles and the friendship of such as Hunt, Carlyle, Milnes, Barry, Procter, and the actor, Macready, who wrote of it: "A work of great daring, starred with poetry of thought, feeling, diction, but occasionally obscure." Apropos of this "Obscurity" debate, G. W. Smalley has said: "When I appeared to Browning no more professed always to know what he had meant than Rufus Choate to decipher his own handwriting after a lapse of time."

1827—(May 1)—"Stratford," the first of ten dramatic poems, produced at Covent Garden Theatre. Although the cast was headed by Macready and Helen Faucit, the piece lasted only five nights.

1840—"Sordello." From this sprang most of the "obscurity" talk. Alfred Tennyson said he could understand only the first and last lines; Jane Carlyle couldn't make out whether Sordello was a man, a city or a book; Fitzgerald and Matthew Arnold announced their inability to read it, and Edmund Gosse has summed up with "it is written in crabbed shorthand."

"Bells and Pomegranates" appeared in the following eight parts:

1841—(I) "Pippa Passes." "The greatest poem ever written (with the exception of one or two my Whitman) to express the sentiment of the pure love of humanity."—Gilbert K. Chesterton.

1842—(II) "King Victor and King Charles."

1842—(III) "Dramatic Lyrics."

1842—(IV) "The Return of the Druses."

1843—(V) "The Biot on the Scutcheon." Played for three nights at Drury Lane Theatre.

1844—(VI) "Colombe's Birthday." Produced at the Haymarket in April, 1853.

1845—(VII) "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics."

1846—(VIII) "Luria; and a Soul's Tragedy." Reviewing this work in 1848, James Russell Lowell wrote in the North American Review: "To us he appears to have a wider range and greater freedom of movement than any other of the younger English poets."

1845—"Saul." "One of those superb outbursts of poetic force. . . . It sweeps along eager, impetuous, resistless as the streams which descend from the Alps and rush seaward with joy."—Hamilton W. Mabie.

1850—"Christmas Eve and Easter Day." "Full of pathos and humor; full of beauty and grandeur, earnestness and truth."—George MacDonald.

1852—"An essay on the letters of Shelley; his only prose production."

1856—"Men and Women." "The book

by which Browning was best known."

Here was the heart of his genius beating most strenuously and with an immortal vitality. Perhaps this, for its compass, is the collection of poetry the most various and rich of modern English times, almost of any English times."—Andrew Lang.

1862—"Prospect." "A cry of passionate exaltation," consecrating the memory of the wife who just had died.

1864—"Dramatic Personae."

1868-1869 (November-February)—"The Ring and the Book." This, with its 21,000 lines, the longest poem in the language, was reviewed by "The Athenaeum" as "the most profound and precious spiritual treasure that English has produced since Shakespeare." Robert Louis Stevenson wrote of it in 1881: "The noblest book of this century."

1871—"Balaustion's Adventure."

1871—"Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau."

1872—"Fifine at the Fair." Rossetti's long friendship with Browning came to an end through an unfounded

by which Browning was best known.

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